

## THE INFLUENCE OF GEOLOGY IN OHIO PLACE-NAMES

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Except for those of Indian origin, surprisingly few place-names in Ohio sprang from that most direct manner of choosing a name—the geography, geology, or environment of the locality. The Indian, having little tradition or historical ties in his background, selected his names from appearances, and usually with an association, sometimes general, sometimes pointed, to surroundings. The Indian word from which *Ohio* was derived is said to have meant “beautiful river”. Sandusky was named for its cold streams, the Tuscarawas for “wide mouth”. Hocking signified “the gourd” or “the bottle” because of the resemblance, in the rock basin and spillway at its edge, at Rock Mill. The Indian’s name for Mt. Pleasant at Lancaster was “The Standingstone”, a choice certainly far more vivid than the present designation.

It is almost impossible to trace Indian names to their derivation because of dialects involved, and because to white men who tried to record them, the originals were full of strange consonants and misleading gutturals. As a result, Indian names were handled roughly as they went through French and then English translations, and they were even more severely dealt with by early cartographers who received them orally from explorers and soldiers. Occasional names took a form that made their source uncertain—they may equally well have been Indian or French or English. Chagrin is such a word. According to the well-known account, it was given by Moses Cleaveland in 1796 when he and the exploring group he led mistook the Chagrin River for the Cuyahoga, and when, upon discovering their error, Cleaveland chose the particular name because it expressed the emotional reaction of his party. Bearing in mind that this is a region where other large streams have names of French origin—Grand, Roche (now Rocky) and Vermilion—and the fact that the word “chagrin” seems strangely out of character, there is reasonable ground for being dubious as to the story. On Rufus Putnam’s map of January, 1804, the river is shown as *Shaguin*, and in early histories the name has been given as *Shagrin*, supposedly meaning, in local Indian dialect, “clear”. Finally, to confuse the matter further, Saguin’s Post, or French Town, is said to have been located a few miles away on the Cuyahoga in what is now Brooklyn Township.

While English-speaking people had little patience with Indian place-names, the French were careful to preserve them even though many of the originals were translated and preserved in the French form. Perhaps it is for the same reason that French on a menu is more enticing than English, nevertheless the fact is that French geographic names have an imagery and originality that is rarely equalled in English. Who wouldn’t prefer Baton Rouge to Red Stick, or even to Red Cypress, for which, because of the abundant cypress trees, the place was evidently named? Or where is the childlike idiom of the Indian better preserved than in the name Trempealeau? That huge rock hill, an island in the Mississippi, the Indian called “The Mountain Soaking in the Water”; the French equivalent, “La montagne qui trempe a l’eau” is descriptive poetry too rarely found in geographic names.

The origin of a geographic name is frequently difficult to trace because of outright changes. Even more difficulty results from modifications and distortions which some names underwent. Throughout the United States, any number of towns, rivers and lakes bear names entirely different than their originals, changes sometimes made by natives who had a struggle with the original spelling, sometimes (for the same reason, apparently) by the Post Office Department or the Board on

Geographic Names, and frequently with little credit to whatever person or agency was responsible. For English-speaking people had as little patience with French names as with Indian! In southern Arkansas, in a region with a liberal scattering of names of French origin, is the oil town, Smackover. Originally it was a trail, arched over by spreading trees, and the French named it the "covered way", or *Chemin Couvert*. Now, *Chemin Couvert* was hard to say and harder to spell, so it became something sensible—first, Smack Cover, and then Smack Over. At the foot of the Gros Ventre mountains—a name, by the way, for the anatomical development of a particular tribe of Indians—is the town in Wyoming with the telescoped name *Grofont*. In northern Michigan, the island Bois Blanc, named for the white birches, is known as Bob Lo; and in Missouri, Bois Brulé, meaning "burned woods", is *Bob Ruley*. Simplification is not alone to blame for ridiculous changes, for some resulted from such things as attempts at euphemism and polite speech. A few miles west of the Muskingum County line, on Route 40, is Buzzard Glory Knob, re-styled some years ago Crow's Nest—a change involving a contradiction of natural fact, and a substitution of the commonplace for a name that was bright with color and melody and motion.

Those who named early settlements believed as zealously as the father of Tristram Shandy in the destiny of a name, consequently many that were chosen were deliberately stilted. It has been said that Ohio is surpassed only by Pennsylvania (1) in the number of classical geographic names. Xenia, Gallipolis, and Akron (the last, it might be said, of geological origin) are a few of Ohio's classical names. Local color in the choice of a name was probably regarded as a handicap to future development. For many reasons, therefore, geological names are in the minority in Ohio. Where they can be found, they represent obscure and sometimes forgotten places, and often they have a narrow and frequently trivial application.

#### NAMES BASED ON WATER SUPPLY

One category into which geologic place-names are grouped is based on the source and nature of the water supply. The largest Ohio city so named, though from the frequency elsewhere it might be assumed to have been a "transferred" name, is Springfield. The first settler in Springfield was James Demint, who arrived in 1799. The site was surveyed in 1801 by John Daugherty, and the following year Simon Kenton moved to what is now West Springfield. The name Springfield was chosen by Mrs. Kenton because of the many springs along the cliffs of Buck Creek. Springboro, in northern Warren County, the site of a spring which is said by Fuller (2) to be one of the largest in southwestern Ohio, issues from thick drift deposits. Yellow Springs, in Greene County—particularly the largest spring which gave the place its name—flows from the Springfield limestone, and is so charged with calcium carbonate that it has built large deposits of travertine at the surface. The iron carbonate "chalybeate" water has given the deposits a definite rust-yellow color. At Green Springs, on the Seneca-Sandusky County line, a number of springs (3) come from the Tymochtee limestone. One of these discharges 8 million gallons per day, and was so prized by the Seneca Indians that, when the white man was about to take over the spring in 1814, the Indians attempted to choke off its flow by filling the basin with rocks and logs.

Two villages were given more descriptive names. Sinking Spring, in Adams County, was named for a small flow which, after emerging from Niagara limestone, disappears underground in joints of eastward-dipping rocks. In Ross County is Spout Spring, now known as Humboldt, an artesian-like discharge from the contact of the Ohio shale and the underlying limestone, which at one time spouted water from a hollow log driven horizontally into the crevice.

The town adjacent to the largest spring in northern Ohio was given a classical name—Castalia. Water from nearby Blue Hole in a volume of approximately 7 million gallons per day is responsible for the name of Cold Creek, and also the

Indian "Sandusky", which had the same meaning. Another city with a classical, and probably the most musical name in Ohio, is Bellefontaine, so called because of the numerous springs from the limestone outlier and glacial gravels around it.

#### NAMES FROM MINERAL RESOURCES

Mineral resources have been the basis for most of Ohio's geological place-names, and, as might be expected, coal leads all others. The first coal used in Cleveland (4) and on Lake Erie was shipped over the then new Ohio canal in 1828, and came from Coal Hill in Tallmadge Township, Summit County, from a mine owned by Henry Newberry, the father of J. S. Newberry the geologist. Coalburg, in the southeast corner of Trumbull County, furnished one of the first iron-making coals to be used anywhere. This was the Sharon coal, and because it could be used without first coking, it gave the Youngstown area an early impetus in the iron industry. In Weathersfield Township, Trumbull County, the Sharon coal and associated Black Band ore gave the name to Mineral Ridge. The iron ore known as "American Scotch" was mined under the ridge and was once important in the industry throughout the entire Mahoning valley. In Athens County, two mining towns were named from the Middle Kittanning coal—Carbondale and Mineral, both in Waterloo Township. Coalton, in Jackson County, was the site of coal operations as early as 1878 in the Quakertown coal. Cannelville, in Brush Creek Township, Muskingum County, was named for the cannel<sup>1</sup> characteristics of the upper part of the Upper Freeport coal, though the Middle Kittanning was later the important bed there. In Waterford Township, Washington County, the Meigs Creek coal is mined in the vicinity of Coal Run. At Minerton, in Vinton County, the Clarion Coal and Vanport limestone were once important. In the same county, the Ferriferous ore was formerly mined by stripping at Oretion, and was used extensively in the iron industry then flourishing in southern Ohio.

At Ironton, the Ferriferous limestone was used as a flux for the iron ore lying immediately above it, and together they made the name Ironton famous for its furnaces. There have been two Galenas in Ohio—the present one in Delaware County was first known as Zoar when founded in the spring of 1816. The other, in northwestern Scioto County, is now called Rarden. Lead being practically unknown in rocks in Ohio, there is no good basis for the mineral origin of the names. The Sunbury shale in the first instance, and the Ohio shale in the second contain many scattered nuggets of pyrite though "Fools Gold" would never do for a town.

The flinty phase of the Vanport limestone is responsible for the name Flint Ridge, in Licking and Muskingum Counties. At Glass Rock, Perry County, the Sharon conglomerate has been quarried and the product shipped for many years for the manufacture of glass. In Lucas County, the Sylvania sandstone (5) has been quarried since 1863 at Silica, from which point the sand has been shipped to such centers as Pittsburgh for glassmaking. In the vicinity of Sandusky Bay, rock gypsum was discovered (6) in the upper part of the Monroe series in 1821, and the town of Gypsum is today a center for quarrying the mineral. Green Island in Lake Erie, southwest of Put-In-Bay, was formerly called Strontian Island for the crystals of celestite (strontium sulphate) so well developed in cavities in the dolomite. In Lake County, the plant of the Diamond Alkali Company, where chemical brine is produced from the Salina series, is located at Alkali.

Salineville, in southwestern Columbiana County, was the site of salt springs and later salt wells, the first of the wells being drilled in 1809, with about twenty producing by 1835, and the last one abandoned in 1880. There are at least three Salt Creeks in Ohio, all once having salt springs along their banks. The one in

<sup>1</sup>A coal formed largely from plant spores and pollen. The name seems to have been a corruption of *candle*, given to the coal because of the ease with which it ignites and the yellow, luminous flame when burning.

Holmes County, flowing into Killbuck Creek, attracted settlers as early as 1809. Putnam's map of 1804 shows salt springs on both the Salt Creek which flows into the Muskingum below Duncan's Falls and the one entering the Scioto in the southeast corner of Ross County.

At White Sulphur, 5 miles southwest of Delaware, the saline sulphur springs were at one time better known than they are now. When the water of the springs was evaporated, a white residue of sodium chloride and other salts remained, once supposed to be sulphur. From the Ohio shale along the banks, the efflorescence of the mineral melanterite or copperas, improperly called alum because of its white color and astringent taste, gave the name to (7) Alum Creek. Along the narrows of Paint Creek in Ross County, the same mineral on the walls of Ohio shale was responsible for the gorge being called Alum Cliffs. A short distance west, the fantastic bluff of under-cut shale is known as Copperas Mountain. In each case, the melanterite was produced through the action of ground water and oxidation of iron sulphide in the shale.

On the Ohio River, 5 miles below Marietta, is Gravel Bank. This outwash deposit lies about 100 feet above present stream level, and in the early days of railroad building (8) furnished more ballast and railroad gravel than any other source in southern Ohio. About ten miles above Marietta, Rainbow Creek enters the Muskingum from the west. Seepages of oil from shallow outcrops and leakage from early wells left iridescent filmy patches on the stream. Hence, from the varicolored hues on the water, the terms Rainbow Creek and the name of the village Rainbow.

#### STRATIGRAPHIC NAMES

Some geographic names originated in connection with local stratigraphy. The Columbus limestone, because of its crystalline nature and the fact that it polished well, was once thought to resemble marble, and so we have Marble Cliff on the west bank of the Scioto at Columbus. Along the Muskingum River south of Zanesville, prominent cliffs are formed by a coarse sandstone, the Cow Run. In many places the rock is covered with lichens, and where it is moist the surface is a definite blue-green. The town on the river at the foot of the rock bluffs is Blue Rock. In southwestern Ohio, on the Greene-Clark county line, the Little Miami river drops over the Niagara escarpment, formed by the outcrop of the Springfield and Cedarville limestones, at the village of Clifton. In Lawrence County, sandstone cliffs in which the Clarion sandstone is prominent overhang "like the cornice of a house" at Hanging Rock.

Rockville was located on the Ohio River at the east line of Adams County. As early as 1814, the Buena Vista sandstone of the Cuyahoga was quarried here, and in 1831 the rock for the Ohio River locks at Cincinnati was taken from these quarries. Starting about 1840, a lower ledge was much used in buildings in Cincinnati and was known as the "City Ledge". The rock was also used in buildings in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, and other cities. Another Rockville located north of Greenfield in Fayette County, on the outcrop of the Monroe, is now known as Rock Mills. Berea sandstone was quarried in the nineties at Stoneville, in the southwest corner of Ashtabula County. Rockbridge in Hocking County is named for the near-by natural bridge in the Black Hand sandstone. An important source of building stone was at Freestone in Scioto County, where sandstone layers of the Cuyahoga were worked and shipped to points as far away as Baltimore, Chicago, Alberta and New Orleans.

Mt. Gilead was originally settled as Whetstone, where Whetstone Creek crosses the outcrop of one of the country's finest natural abrasives, the Berea Grit. In the northeast corner of Seneca County is the town Flat Rock, where the Delaware limestone, lying in thin layers with little soil cover, is on the surface. Flat Rock

Creek is in Paulding County, and was probably named for the thin, plate-like slabs of Tymochtee limestone in its bed.

There are any number of Slate Runs in Ohio, the largest in Huron County, tributary to the west branch of the Huron River. From Siam to Monroeville, Slate Run crosses the Ohio shale. Slate Mills in Ross County is on the north fork of Paint Creek at the outcrop of the Ohio shale.

A short distance beyond the southeast corner of Franklin County is Lithopolis, where the Berea and Cuyahoga outcrop and where the latter sandstone was once quarried for window sills and caps. From the Greek for "stone" and "city," Lithopolis is by coincidence a fitting name for the place of birth of a dictionary publisher.

#### ALTITUDE AND NAMES

There are localities, too, named for their elevation. At the time of the organization of Highland County in 1805, the county seat, Hillsboro, was thought to be the highest point in Ohio. Because of the elevation of the country about it, the county was called Highland. The name of Belmont County was for the beauty of the montaine topography. Altitude, a few miles east of Woodsfield in Monroe County, is perched at an elevation of 1210 feet, about 400 feet above Sunfish Creek, which flows in the adjacent trenced gorge. The divide between Lake Erie and the Ohio River extends diagonally across the southern part of Summit County, and this being the highest area traversed by the Ohio Canal, the county was named Summit when founded in 1840. Akron, for the Greek "high", was the name given the county seat. Many names of this kind are those of railroad towns. On the D. T. and I., in southeast Ross County, is Summithill, at the crest of one of the steepest railroad grades in Ohio. In a series of spectacular bends and turns the railroad climbs from an elevation of 723 feet at Bainbridge to 1085 at Summithill, and descends to 572 feet at Waverly. Crestline, in Crawford County, was originally known as Livingston when the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and Indianapolis railroad was built in 1850. When, in 1852, the Pennsylvania railroad reached the village, a new town was begun. This was called Crestline, and when the towns merged, the name Livingston disappeared. Crestline lies between the northeast extension of the Broadway and Powell moraines at about 1170 feet elevation, and it is said that it, too, was at one time thought to be one of the high points in the State.

On the northern boundary of Wayne County, and on the Allegheny escarpment, is Creston—likewise a railroad town, the elevation of which is about 1000 feet. On the Logan-Hardin county line, and on the St. John's-Mt. Victory moraine, is Ridgeway. Two divisions of the New York Central cross here at an elevation of about 1060 feet.

Although there are many "mountains" in Ohio having specific names, one of them should be mentioned because of its geographic prominence. Little Mountain is on the Lake-Geauga county line, about 7 miles northwest of Chardon. This knob, capped by Sharon conglomerate, lies on the Portage escarpment. From its summit of nearly 1300 feet elevation, overlooking to the north the beaches of Lakes Maumee, Whittlesey and Warren, and with Lake Erie in the distance, the view (9) from Little Mountain is one of the most impressive in Ohio.

#### PHYSIOGRAPHIC NAMES

Some localities were named for their physiographic setting. Plain City, in Madison County, is located on the "Darby Plains", a portion of the flat Wisconsin ground morain. Prairie Depot, Wood County, is on the monotonous "black swamp" of Lake Warren. Belpre, in Washington County on the flood plain of the Ohio River, has a name of French origin meaning "fine meadowland". South

Point, on the Ohio in Lawrence County, is very near the southernmost point in Ohio, and bears a name which is geographic rather than geologic. Moraine City, now a part of Dayton, lies on the dissected Bloomington moraine of the Wisconsin drift sheet.

In Ottawa County, a resistant ridge of Guelph dolomite is called Rocky Ridge, and in Henry County, a village on the beach ridge of Lake Whittlesey is known as Ridgeville Corners. On an old shore line south of Conneaut in Ashtabula County is South Ridge, and in Lorain County, North Ridgeville is located on the beach ridge of Lake Warren, the northernmost of three old shore lines.

In Fairfield County, the topographic map shows Slough, a small community a short distance east of Lithopolis. A few hundred yards west of Slough is a marshy area (10) of glacial lacustrine deposit, the result of a northward-flowing stream being blocked by Wisconsin ice and the recessional moraine the ice left.

In Boston Township, Summit County, is the village of Peninsula. The town antedates the railroad, which was not built until 1873, but the Ohio Canal, following the Cuyahoga at this point, had been completed in the early 1820's. From the river and the canal, the steep bluff, capped by Sharon conglomerate, juts into the stream in a narrow promontory so that even though far inland, to a "canawler", this was indeed a "peninsula".

#### NAMES INDIRECTLY RELATED TO GEOLOGY

There are certain geographic names derived from the manner in which the local rocks affected the scenery or impressed the observer. Yellow Creek, in Jefferson County, was so called because of its iron-charged water coming from drainage at the level of coal beds. Iron-depositing bacteria and algae coated every rock and pebble and assisted to give the stream channel its bright color. Another Yellow Creek enters the Mahoning River at Poland. The Black River in Lorain County was probably named from the gloom of its deep valley, resulting from both the black Ohio shale and the heavy foliage along the steep valley walls. Rocky River cuts through rocks extending from the Chagrin to the Cuyahoga, and because of its steep gradient, the stream has swept away smaller fragments but has left its channel strewn with the large pieces of rock debris. The Vermilion River was named for the brick-red color resulting where the Ohio shale had been exposed to fire. The burned shale was used by the Indians for red pigment. The name Paint Creek, west of Chillicothe, was in all likelihood given for the same reason.

Because of the fact that early names were not recorded, it is possible that many may have had a geological origin. In times when the transmission of a word was oral and not written, when few of the early transients or residents were expert spellers, and when, particularly, French words and Indian dialects were involved, it is surprising that original forms have been preserved at all. Undoubtedly, many place-names have been altered in adapting them to English. When Anthony Wayne was in northwestern Ohio, a journal (11) was kept for him by one Lieutenant Boyer through which, repeatedly, the river Auglaize is written *Oglaize*. The word Auglaize is said by many authorities to have been Indian and to have meant "fallen timber". The word looks and sounds French, however, and it might be noted that forms such as Au, Aux, Eau and other variants, all applied to streams, are found throughout the world in regions traversed or settled by the French. Lieutenant Boyer's phonetic "O" suggests, especially with the spelling "Au", a French origin. The Auglaize is a larger stream than is sometimes supposed—it is exceeded in drainage area, in fact, by but five Ohio rivers—yet it has one of the lowest gradients in the State. With its low gradient and its leisurely flow, the mirrored surface of its waters may have been the reason for the second syllable of the name.

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